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THE SIDNEY BREESE PAPERS

AN IMPORTANT GIFT TO THE ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND LIBRARY

The Illinois State Historical Library has received a most important gift through the generosity of Mr. Sidney Breese, of Springfield, Ill., who has presented the Library with a large collection of the letters and papers of his grandfather, Sidney Breese, United States Senator from Illinois 1843-49, Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court of Illinois 1857 until his death in 1878, and more than one term Chief Justice.

The elder Sidney Breese was a native of Whitesboro, N. Y., and came to Illinois in 1818. His career in Illinois was long and distinguished from his first official service as Postmaster at Kaskaskia and assistant Secretary of State of Illinois in 1820—during which latter service he supervised the removal of the records of the State from Kaskaskia to the new capital at Vandalia—to the office of United States Senator and associate and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois.

Sidney Breese graduated at Union College in 1818, and the same year came to Illinois. He was a most courtly and polished gentleman and was of distinguished lineage and family connections, his mother having been the daughter of Henry Livingston and of the noted New York family of that name.

Sidney Breese was married at Kaskaskia in 1823 to Eliza, the daughter of William Morrison, one of the pioneer merchants of the Mississippi Valley.

In the United States Senate, Sidney Breese performed for his country a great and patriotic service in his labors in behalf of the proposed Illinois Central and Pacific railroads.

His clear and prophetic vision seems most remarkable in view of subsequent events. He was much interested in the history of Illinois and the Mississippi Valley, and on December 12, 1842, he delivered an historical address, by invitation, before the

General Assembly of Illinois. This interesting historical paper was found among the effects of Judge Breese and edited by Hon. Thomas Hoyne, and accompanied by a biographical memoir of the Author by Hon. Melville W. Fuller, it was published in 1884 under the title of the "Early History of Illinois from its Discovery by the French in 1673 until its Cession to Great Britain in 1763." This invaluable historical document has been widely read and much quoted. Judge Breese, says Judge Fuller, "in this field anticipated the researches of many who have since won in it great distinction."

In 1835, Judge Breese moved from Kaskaskia to Clinton County, and took up his residence upon what became known as the Mound Farm, near Carlyle. In 1845, he moved into the town and that little city was his home the remainder of his life.

He died June 28, 1878.

This article is intended only to briefly sketch the career of Judge Breese in order to remind our readers of his distinguished service to the State, and of the opportunities which his life and labors afforded of correspondence with distinguished men of the State and country during his long official career.

This collection is the largest and most noteworthy single collection of letters which the Historical Society and Library has ever received, and the Board of Trustees of the Library has accepted the gift most gratefully on behalf of the State of Illinois. The collection has been called the Sidney Breese Collection, in honor of its generous donor.

The papers will be carefully preserved and collated, and they will probably be published, although no definite conclusion has been reached as to the manner of publication.

In the papers presented by Mr. Breese are letters from:

Stephen A. Douglas; General James Shields; Senator James Semple; Senator Richard M. Young; Gov. William H. Bissell; Colonel Don Morrison; President Van Buren; Secretary of State Lewis Cass; Simon Cameron, Lincoln's first Secretary of War; Melville W. Fuller; Justin Butterfield; Governor A. C. French; Governor J. A. Matteson; Chief Justice John D. Caton; John Wentworth; Thomas Hoyne; David L. Gregg; Commodore Perry; Governor John Reynolds; Gustavus Koerner; Joseph Phillips, first Chief Justice of Illinois; N. H. Ridgely; Charles H. Lanphier; Thomas Hope; Bishop Doane; Bishop Potter; Declaration of Ebenezer Bourn, one of the soldiers in Col.

George Rogers Clark's expedition in 1778, in the capture of Kaskaskia; Elias Kent Kane; William Engle; Letter of Thomas B. Reed to William Morrison, of December 19th, 1820; a list of Captain Charleville's Volunteers, entitled to 200 acres of land each; E. Menard; A. B. Johnson; Solon Borland; Mason Brayman; James H. Hackett, the actor, father of the present James K. Hackett; John A. Kennicott; Charles Fletcher; together with numerous old documents, maps and writings.